



**Torrige District Council**  
**External Overview & Scrutiny**

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2019/2020**

## **Introduction by the Chair**

The committee was particularly busy during 2019, partially due to several additional meetings held in conjunction with North Devon Council. This collaborative working has enabled us to consider a wider range of topics in greater depth, often from a different perspective. Several projects have been ongoing and have been regularly reviewed during meetings. Additionally, an enormous effort was made in preparing responses to public consultations and I would like to extend thanks to Councillors Ford and Hackett for the work carried out with regard to the Fire Service consultation.

Several meetings scheduled for early 2020 had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus and we did not have the opportunity to look at a few items on our forward plan, including the Play Strategy, Public Health England, the Citizens Advice Bureau, together with a further review of the Community Safety Partnership and the Partner Evaluation Form.

The report includes a brief summary of the role and responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny, the work undertaken over the past year and the various outcomes, although the link to outcomes is not always discernible until much later on.

It has been an interesting year and I would like to thank both committee members and Sean Kearney, Janet Williams, Mary Richards and Sandra Cawsey for their involvement and the contribution they have made to our meetings.

The report comes at a time of great concern for many with the covid issues very much in the forefront of our thinking, planning and actions. Thanks must go to all key workers across many organisations who have gone the extra mile to keep residents safe. The community spirit shown throughout the pandemic in both urban and rural Torridge has been superb. There will be a "new normal", and this External Overview & Scrutiny committee will want to work alongside the many partners serving our communities in delivering the best for our communities.

**Councillor P Pennington**  
**Chair – External Overview & Scrutiny**

# The Role of External Overview & Scrutiny

The Council has 2 Overview & Scrutiny Committees, an **External** Overview & Scrutiny Committee and an **Internal** Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committees have the power to review the policies of the Council and its objectives, and are entitled to 'call in' decisions made by the Community & Resources Committee which are not yet implemented. They can also recommend that the Community & Resources Committee reconsider such decisions. Issues that remain unresolved will be referred to the Full Council for determination.

The External Overview & Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the performance of selected external bodies and companies serving the community within Torridge.

The External Overview & Scrutiny Committee is also the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee.

The Council remains committed to its current policy of involving the community in its decision making process and includes community representation on both Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

## Committee Membership

Chair	Councillor P Pennington
Vice Chair	Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin
Councillors	L Ford S Harding C Hawkins S Langford C Leather J McKenzie S Newton
Non-elected representatives	Mr P Topham Vacancy x 2
Support officers	S Kearney, Planning & Economy Manager J Williams, Environmental Health Manager & Community Safety Manager S Cawsey, Democratic Services Officer M Richards, Democratic Services Officer

## **Work carried out in 2019/20:**

### **Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities**

#### Burton Art Gallery – 5 June 2019

Judith Gentry and Steve Harding attended the meeting on 5 June, providing an overview of the governance of both the trust and the trading company. They spoke about the permanent collections, visiting exhibitions, awards received and engagement with schools. Members asked questions about footfall, marketing, advertising and social media.

Recommendations were made by the committee that:

- The Lead Member for Community, Culture & Leisure monitor the performance of The Burton and feed back to committee.
- The Burton take exhibitions out to the wider Torridge area.

Outcomes from the above recommendations:

The Burton has responded by housing an exhibition in a horsebox which now tours the district.

#### Fire Service Consultation

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service published its Seven Options Safer Together Consultation Document in June 2019. These proposals included the closure of Appledore Fire Station and the change in status (removal of full time crewing) of Barnstaple. Councillors Ford and Hackett met with fire officers and prepared an informative background paper which was considered by the committee.

A local and a global response to the consultation was submitted by the committee which included the following recommendations in relation to the proposed closure of Appledore Fire Station:

#### **GLOBAL RESPONSE - Devon and Somerset Consultation Document**

- This committee supports proposals to review and realise aspects of Fire Service delivery.
- We strongly recommend that the Fire Service further takes account of projected population increases in the area.
- We take the view that service reorganisation undertaken currently with cost savings has proven less effective.
- We strongly oppose any reduction in service provision under current changing circumstances in the area.
- We are concerned that the public consultation document does not allow for an open-ended and creative response.

## LOCAL RESPONSE

- That the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue consultation process takes account of the background document set out by Councillors L Ford and P Hackett.
- Future-proofing the delivery of our local fire service being fully recruited given the increased population growth

Subsequently, Fire Authority Members met on 10 January 2020 and agreed to defer the decision to implement the day crewing at Barnstaple, Exmouth and Paignton, subject to a revised 24/7 crew model being agreed with the Fire Brigades Union before the end of the financial year.

3818 responses were received for the Service Delivery Consultation along with 5 petitions with a total of 43,644 signatures.

### Health And Wellbeing Board Stakeholder Consultation – 21 August

The committee reviewed the draft strategy document and put forward the following ideas in response to the consultation:

- That the important role of carers be specifically mentioned, especially having consideration of our aging population, and their needs supported.
- That there are areas of Devon which are particularly subject to high levels of deprivation and Torridge would be included in that, and these give rise to the need for a complex and focussed response.
- The report would benefit from practical outcomes reflecting the needs of an aging and low income population, and clear 'pathways to implementation'.
- The issue of child poverty and especially food provision for children in school holidays was a particular area of concern.

### NHS Long Term Plan – 15 October 2019

This meeting was a joint collaboration with North Devon Council. The guest speaker was Mr John Finn, Associate Director of Commissioning, Northern Devon and Eastern/Planned Care and Cancer, NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group.

A presentation on the Long Term Plan informed members about the planned directions over the next 5 years, the challenges, the joint health and wellbeing strategy priorities.

The committee put forward the following recommendations:

- That there be no reduction in any of the current services from North Devon Hospital and the care it provides.
- That there should be a recruitment drive for staff at North Devon Hospital and promote great confidence in its future.
- That Torridge District Council fully support the reinstatement of nursing bursaries

- That an opportunity be created for “Senior Executives” of Councils and Health Bodies to discuss social determinants of health relating to housing, education, transport, employment and the Police.
- That the Local Health Authority and Government look into the lack of resources in the Mental Health Services for adolescents, and for schools to provide awareness training.
- That Education be actively involved in the One Northern Devon Partnership.
- That emphasis be placed on equality for health care for those marginalised in social society.
- That digital service be provided to rural areas.
- That Mr John Finn, Presenter, be requested to apply pressure to address the inequality of mental health funding.

### Community Safety Partnership – 31 October

In accordance with statutory requirements, an annual update was provided by the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership, Superintendent Davies. It was reassuring to learn that, although crime in the region is increasing, northern Devon remains one of the safest places to live in nationally and this is down to the community and the CSP partners who work well together.

The committee raised the following areas of concern with Superintendent Davies:

- Alcohol, drug abuse, mental health, suicide and self harm and the need for a Local Place of Safety in northern Devon. Superintendent Davies advised that there are Places of Safety in Exeter, Torbay and Plymouth but more locally there are other facilities such as the crisis café.
- Licensing hours and the demands on support services - news that Torridge was looking to relaunch the Pub Watch scheme in the new year was received with approval.
- Anti social behaviour – information was given about Public Spaces Protection Orders.

The committee requested more information about what the CSP had been doing over the last 12 months.

Recommendations made by the committee:

- That the CSP address, as a priority the issues of suicide, mental health and self harm in the northern Devon area.
- That the NFU be invited to be a partner in the CSP.
- That the possibility of establishing a Place of Safety in northern Devon be investigated.
- That research be conducted into the impact or benefits of reducing licensing hours.

### 1610 – 22 January 2020

The presentation given by 1610 addressed the complaints and issues received by

the authority over the last 12 months regarding the leisure facilities in Torrington and it was noted that the contract had two years left to run.

The following recommendations were put forward:

- A review of the need for significant capital investment in partnership with outside agencies be undertaken
- Comments and opinions from an expert engineer and 1610 with regards to the boilers at Holsworthy Leisure Centre be included on the action list and subject to a satisfactory conclusion, be discussed further at the Property and Major Projects Working Group
- That the Constitution Working Group consider the setting up of an Environmental and Leisure Services Committee

## Prosperous and Sustainable Economy

### NFU and North Devon Biosphere - 17 July 2019

The National Farmers Union and the Northern Devon Biosphere had both been invited to the meeting and between them delivered a comprehensive overview of their vision of the future of farming and the correlation with care for the natural world. Both organisations give equal priority to environmental and economy issues.

The NFU presentation focused on the market dynamic, pricing, the agricultural supply industries and exports and set out the areas where change might be expected. With regard to Brexit, there was a confidence that, with education and encouragement to buy locally, the industry would be able to cover the demand of the country.

Mr Bell of the Biosphere spoke of the collaboration between the organisations and the impact of farming and land management on the environment. The committee learnt that the Northern Devon Biosphere had been selected to host the Landscape Pioneer, an initiative which will look at new approaches to the management of farmland, natural habitats, watercourses and coastal and urban environments

The committee made recommendations that:

- The Council profile be updated to reflect the rural nature of Torrington.
- This Council resolve to work closely with the agricultural sector in reducing carbon by 2030.
- Torrington District Council engage better with the public on rural matters.
- The committee looks forward to a further review of agriculture in conjunction with Devon Council.

OUTCOME – A section has been added to the Torrington profile which presents facts about land usage and labour figures together with a short history illustrating the impact of change on this industry in Torrington.

## Great Torrington Community Development Trust – 27 November

Di Nicholson of the Great Torrington Community Development Trust informed the committee that the Community Trust had been set up in the mid 1990s and, with the aid of significant funding, had renovated the Pannier Market and the Castle Hill building. The Community Trust was reviewing how to establish long-term financial sustainability and how to increase community engagement to meet the changing needs of the town.

The purpose of the presentation was to update the committee, although assistance with advertising the Community Development Trust would be welcomed. The committee offered guidance on ways to secure financial sustainability.

## Northern Devon Futures Group – 22 January 2020

Mr Sean MacKney, Principal and CEO of Petroc College, attended the meeting on 22 January 2020, and gave a verbal presentation on both Education and Skills and Northern Devon Futures Group.

Mr MacKney highlighted the improvements, achievements and successes that had been made at the College.

The Northern Devon Futures Group had been set up with representatives from Torrington District Council, North Devon Council and various outside bodies to address the need for partnership working across all of Northern Devon. The purpose of the group was to develop a confident and long term vision for Northern Devon in terms of investible propositions.

## Quality Environment

### Play Strategy – 27 November 2019

Although resource issues had delayed the Play Strategy, an outside company had been contracted to undertake a play strategy review. Some work had already been carried out in house which had resulted in the formulation of a schedule of green spaces and responses had been collated from Town and Parish Councils which gave a better understanding of the facilities available. The ongoing work was due to have been further considered at the March 2020.

## Internal Updates

### External Grants Task & Finish Group

Representatives from both the Internal and External Overview & Scrutiny Committees formed a task and finish group which met several times during 2019.



The following recommendations were made:

- a. No New Homes Bonus grants scheme to run from 2020-21.
- b. Those organisations who are listed under external grants but who provide a Service Level Agreement for Torridge District Council should be removed from the External Grants list and funding continued at existing levels. However, bodies should submit a break-down of proposed spending at the start of each year to justify their grant and an evaluation at the end of the financial year.
- c. This includes the following bodies:
  - North Devon Biosphere Partnership
  - North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
  - TTVS
  - Citizens Advice Bureau
  - North Devon Plus
  - North Devon Women's Aid
- d. Funding for existing recipients to be continued as is for 2020-21, halved for 2021-22 and then ended. Current grant totals provided in brackets below. This includes the following bodies:
  - Holsworthy Community Transport (£6,500)
  - Affinity Bideford TIC (£1,000)
  - Holsworthy TIC (£4,500)
  - Great Torrington TIC (£4,220)
  - Bideford New Year's Eve (£3,000)
- e. Increased capacity and skill building will be facilitated during the wind-down period. Proposed input will need to be given in terms of governance, funding bids, policies, web presence and skills audits.
  - i. Role of the Community Engagement Officer to actively engage with and support community bodies across the district, as well as to map current provision and where gaps exist.
  - ii. Capacity building should be provided to existing grant recipients and other bodies who are operating at a community level who have not previously received grant funding.

## Partner Evaluations

In 2017 the Committee commissioned an interview survey of Torridge District Council partners who are periodically invited to discuss their work with the Committee. The survey led to the development of a Partner Evaluation Form (PEF) to be completed by partners following their presentations to the Committee. The PEF has been trialled for 18 months from July 2018 to March 2020 with 12 forms being returned. Partners' answers to the eight PEF questions about their experience of working with the Committee are summarised below:

Question	Average score (mean)	Range of scores (1-7 max)
To what extent were you able to speak freely about the work of your organisation?	6.8	6-7
To what extent was there a useful exchange of views about the needs of the community?	6.4	6-7
To what extent do you think that your organisation has a good working relationship with the Committee?	6.0	5-7
How well did you feel that the Committee understands the work of your organisation?	5.6	4-7
To what extent do your meetings with the Committee help to ensure value for money for the public and/or the Council?	5.3	4-7
To what extent does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide you with sufficient information about its aims and membership?	4.9	3-6
To what extent did your meeting with the Committee help you to think differently about the work of your organisation?	4.6	2-7
To what extent does the Committee communicate with you about their recommendations and actions following your presentations?	4.2	1-7

These ratings of the Committee experience and the additional comments on the evaluation forms tend to support the findings of the original interview survey (available on request):

- **Partners' relationship with the Committee and the Council is valued.** They have good working relationship with Officers, where applicable, and some would like to see more of their Councillors.
- **Partners appreciate being heard and the quality of open discussion** at Committee meetings. They are less certain about whether the Committee experience has an impact on their work.

- **Partners would like to be better informed** about the Committee's aims and membership. They would also like to be informed about any recommendations made and actions taken following their presentation.

A full review of the Partner Evaluation Forms is scheduled for the Committee to discuss later in 2020.

## **The coming 12 months**

Our residents face many challenges in the light of Covid 19. The vulnerable are shielding, the economy, particularly hospitality and tourism, have been hugely impacted. Local Authority services will be under pressure due to funding difficulties.

It has been an especially difficult time for those who have lost a loved one and our thoughts are with families and friends. The huge negative of this time is the isolation so many have found themselves in.

Equally, the lock down has brought about hidden blessings. Communities have pulled together supporting and caring in a new and dynamic way. Nature has been at its most beautiful – I have heard a cuckoo – the first time in years. Opportunities for reconsidering previous norms is now on the future agenda.

Our communities are looking at the “new normal” in so many areas. External Overview & Scrutiny will have an exciting and challenging time in the coming year.